DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 974 CG 026 268

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TITLE Professional Issues in Counseling: Teaching Experience as a Requirement for the Certification of School Counselors.
PUB DATE [94]
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Counseling Effectiveness; *Counselor Certification; Counselor Performance; *Counselor Qualifications; *Counselor Training; Elementary Secondary Education; *School Counselors; *Teaching Experience
IDENTIFIERS *Counselor Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

The debate concerning whether school counselors need teaching experience has existed as long as there have been guidance workers in the school. Proponents of teaching experience requirements feel that counselors need teaching experience to adequately learn the functions of the school system and to relate well to other professionals within the school system. Conversely, others maintain that teaching experience is not necessary for school counselors to be effective. Research to this date has found no major differences in the effectiveness of counselors with teaching experience compared to those without teaching experience. In order to effectively resolve the debate, however, the role of the school counselor must be clearly defined. More research on the efficacy of school counselors with or without teaching experience is warranted. (JE)

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ED 383 974

Professional Issues in Counseling:

Teaching Experience as a Requirement for the Certification of School Counselors

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Running Head: Professional issues

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The debate concerning whether or not school counselors need teaching experience has existed as long as there have been guidance workers in the schools. The debate has historically and is currently centered on two basic arguments. Proponents of the teaching experience argument feel that counselors need teaching experience to adequately learn the functions of the school system and to relate well to other professionals within the school system (Baker & Herr, 1976). Conversely, others maintain that teaching experience is not necessary for school counselors to be effective (Baker & Herr, 1976; Lister, 1969; Olsen & Allen, 1993)

As early as 1969, Lister outlined the major tenets of each school of thought, reviewed research, and arrived at some conclusions relative to the importance of teaching experience for school counselors. Basic to his findings, was the idea that there is an "incomplete and static conception of effective counselor functioning" (p.43). His view was that teaching experience for school counselors had been continued without evidence that it was necessary. He proposed, then, that state departments, school personnel, and counselor educators should cooperate in the effort to train and employ counselors from nonteaching backgrounds and to base the

hiring of counselors relative to the needs of specific school counseling programs. However, this suggestion is difficult to implement if there are no clear conceptions of the factors that contribute to effective school counselors. Based on the current state of affairs in school counseling, it is apparent that little has changed since Lister's conceptualization of the issue. According to Olsen and Allen (1993), only 29 states currently provide for counselors without teaching experience to become certified as school counselors. The longevity of this debate and the lack of resolution of the argument hold important implications for school counselors and counselor educators. In this paper, arguments on both sides are presented and implications for counselor training and practice and further research are addressed.

The Pro Argument-Counselors Need Teaching Experience

Proponents of the argument that school counselors need teaching experience claim that counselors with teaching experience will both relate to teachers better and understand the school as an organizational structure (Baker & Herr, 1976). According to Lister (1969), teachers and principals consider the major factor in counselor effectiveness to be teaching experience rather than counselor education. Related to this

argument is the perception that a counselor who has not actually been in the classroom cannot understand a teacher's problems with students no matter how extensive his or her counselor preparation and counseling experience.

Apparently, many educators and administrators share this view (Baker & Herr, 1976; Dilley, Foster, & Bowers, 1973; Lister, 1969; Olsen & Allen, 1993), though there has been no empirical basis for their point of view. According to White and Parsons (1974), the teaching requirement is being perpetuated mainly by "prejudices, biases and emotions" (p.115). Olsen and Allen (1993) state that "although teaching experience as a prerequisite for school counseling does not seem to be supported by reality, perceptions of its importance continue to be held" (p. 19).

The Con Argument-Counselors Do Not Need Teaching Experience

Several studies have supported the view that there is no significant difference between the performance of counselors with as opposed to those without teaching experience (Baker & Herr, 1976; Dilley, Foster, & Bowers, 1973; Lister, 1969; White & Parsons, 1974; Olsen & Allen, 1993). In a summary of the research that had been conducted at the time, Lister (1969) suggested that researchers should

continue in their efforts to compare the effectiveness of counselors with and without teaching experience. Since that time, several studies have supported the view that there is no significant difference between counselors with and without teaching experience (Baker & Herr, 1976; Dilley et al., 1973; White & Parsons, 1974). All of these studies confirm that school counselors do not necessarily need teaching experience to be effective school counselors. Each study concluded that school counselors trained in alternative counselor education programs but without teaching experience were perceived as positively as their colleagues who had prior teaching experience. It was further suggested that the teaching requirement be eliminated and emphasis placed on training the best counselors possible regardless of teaching experience (Dilley et al., 1973). Likewise, there was a consensus among the authors that the requirement exists largely due to perceptions and attitudes that exist among educators and administrators that are not trained as counselors. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support this contention as well.

Current Research on the Teaching Experience Argument

The data and commentary summarized thus far is quite dated. However, according to Olson and Allen (1993), the teaching experience issue has been perpetuated and not challenged for nearly a decade. The issue has been pushed to the forefront of counselor education and certification in Wisconsin due to the Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model. Due to the instructional nature of the Wisconsin model and the involvement of classroom teachers with counselors in the model, many administrators assert that counselors need teaching experience to be effective. A study was conducted much like those of ten years ago. The participants in the study were the public and private principals of elementary, middle and high schools and counselors who had graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Counselor Education Program since 1980 (a program which provides for the training and certification of counselors with and without teaching experience). The performance of counselors with and without teaching experience was evaluated based on questionnaires completed by the principals. The results represent an affirmation of the earlier studies. There were no significant differences between the perceived performance of counselors with teaching experience and those without teaching experience. This was true for both

elementary and high school counselors. Middle school and junior high nonteacher counselors were viewed as less effective in three areas- teacher consultation, individual counseling, and advisory committe participation. It is suggested that counselor training programs might better prepare counselors for the special needs of the middle school population. No significance was reported by this study between the effectiveness of counselors with or without teaching experience in conducting classroom guidance activities. However, it is stated that the efficacy of counselors without teaching experience in planning classroom guidance activities and classroom management remains a concern of school administrators. This concern is being addressed in many counselor education programs by providing training for school counseling students in these competency areas. Finally, the authors suggest that the counseling profession should publicize the success of individual school counselors without teaching experience by including their accomplishments in public relations efforts. The publication of the effectiveness of school counselors without prior teaching experience may provide an impetus for the counseling profession to become active in resolving the issue of whether or not teaching experience is an important facet in the training

and practice of school counselors. Similarly, the effects of prior teaching experience on the counseling skills of school counselors should be examined.

Related Professional Issues

Other professional issues are at the core of the teacher vs. nonteacher debate in school counselor certification. Though the counseling profession as a whole has recently found direction in the requirements for credentialing through NBCC, licensure efforts of state legislatures, and accreditation of counselor education programs through CACREP, these efforts have not resulted in consistent standards for school counselors (Barret & Schmidt, 1986). There are still differences in requirements for entry into school counseling in state departments across the country. Barret and Schmidt also cite the lack of consistent supervision requirements for school counselors. Both of these concerns are evidence of a lack of standard expectations of the school counselor and are possible causes of the unclear perceptions regarding counselor training and employment among school personnel. Counselor educators, professional organizations such as the American Counseling Association and the American School Counselor Association should address these

concerns and thereby, strengthen the professional identity of the school counselor. Clearly, the establishment of standard certification practices across states and established models of school counseling would eliminate the need for the teaching vs. nonteaching debate for school counselors.

Current Implications for Research

The issue of whether school counselors need prior teaching experience to be effective continues to be important. There is a lack of empirical basis on either side of this ongoing argument. According to Olsen and Allen (1993), "additional studies in states with and without alternatives to teaching experience and more comprehensive, fully developed instruments would help to clarify this lingering issue" (p.20). As comprehensive developmental guidance programs and counselor education programs that train counselors without prior teaching experience continue to be developed, there should be an equal increase in outcome research related to this issue. It follows that the answer to the question of whether or not prior teaching experience makes better school counselors, may be found in the data base provided by the new

development of alternative counselor training and comprehensive guidance models.

Conclusion

In review of the issue of teaching experience for school counselors, it becomes apparent that little progress has been made for more than two and a half decades. The arguments summarized by Lister in 1969 are virtually the same as those put forth today. It is evidenced in this literature review that no major differences have been found among the performance of counselors with teaching experience and nonteacher counselors who are trained by analternative educational program. With the onset of developmental guidance projects and the professionalization efforts of counseling as a whole, this issue is again receiving attention. As proposed over a decade ago, school counselors should be trained to be effective counselors regardless of their background. Biases and predjudices without empirical support should be abandoned within the counseling profession, specifically in regard to the requirement that school counselors acquire teaching experience. As Baker and Herr (1976) state, "the crucial variables are more likely to be the quality and content of the counselor education experience as well as the candidate's personal

qualities" (p. 118). It is time for counselors and counselor educators to address whether or not teaching experience is a valid predictor of the success of school counselors. The purpose and definition of a school counselor is at the core of this debate. As counselors, we must actively pursue the definition of "school counselor". What are the most effective roles and functions of the counselor who practices in the school setting? What are the perceptions of school administrators regarding these roles and functions? And what are the next logical steps toward continuity in the certification and practice of school counselors? With these fundamental questions answered, the ongoing debate of teaching experience for school counselors may finally be resolved. Research efforts directed toward each of these questions is needed. But, primary attention should be given to outcome research in the efficacy of school counselors with and without teaching experience.

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